

Bright Before Us is the new novel by Katie Arnold-Ratliff.

katiearnoldratliff.com

Reading Group Guide:

1. What is your impression of Francis? Are there times when you feel more sympathy for him than others? How does your opinion of him change throughout the book?
2. What is it that keeps Francis unable to move past his feelings for Nora?
3. Children appear prominently throughout the book—in Francis’s class, in his marriage, and in glimpses of his early life. What does childhood represent in the novel?
4. Nora calls him Francis, Greta calls him Frank, his mother calls him Frankie, his students call him Mr. Mason—and at one point, Francis confesses that he’s never been sure of his true self (“I’d long worried that I was no one in particular.”) How does the theme of identity evolve over the course of the book?
5. What is your impression of Greta? Is she a likable or sympathetic character? Why do you think she persists in having a relationship with Francis?
6. In what ways does San Francisco, the primary setting of the novel, influence the story?
7. Francis often feels he must do the wrong thing in order to do the right thing: he dumps Greta to be with Nora, for whom his feelings are genuine; he later forces himself to return to a largely empty relationship with Greta for the sake of their unborn baby. In what ways is Francis right and in what ways is he wrong in making these choices?
8. In several scenes, Francis and Nora drive aimlessly together, and a significant portion of the novel involves a cross-country drive. How do the notions of travel, motion, and stasis figure into the story?
9. What purpose does Francis’s time in Nebraska serve for him? What does he learn there?
10. Late in the novel, Francis and Nora ask each other if they were ever really in love. Is *Bright Before Us* a love story?